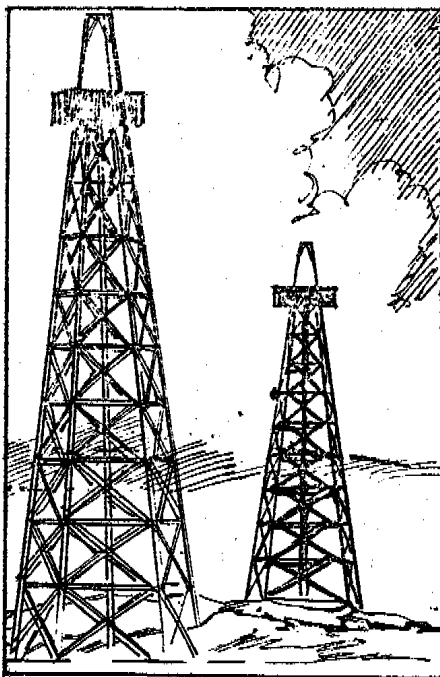


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# AN INTRICATE WEB The Geopolitics of Israel's Survival

BY HANS J. MORGENTHAU



**T**HE SITUATION in the Middle East has been drastically transformed by four interconnected consequences of the October War: (1) the destruction of the belief in Israel's military invincibility; (2) the suggestion of armed involvement by the USSR; (3) the Arab use of oil as a political weapon; and (4) a change in U.S. policy.

The aim of a succession of Israeli governments has been simple—to create and, if need be, to show so incontestable a military superiority that the Arab world would be forced to reconcile itself to the inevitable and accept Israel in its midst. That policy would have worked had it not been for outside intervention. Four times the Arabs tried to eliminate Israel by war, four times they were beaten and three times—in 1948, 1956 and 1973—they were saved from complete defeat by a timely cease-fire that was imposed by the United States and the Soviet Union, acting under cover of the United Nations.

But the October War differs significantly from its predecessors, for the initial stages of the fighting demonstrated that under certain conditions Israel could be challenged on the battlefield. The demonstration has destroyed the foundations of Israel's foreign policy. The Arabs now feel that since the Israelis were successfully taken on once, they could be still more successfully taken on again.

That possibility has been greatly

enhanced by the policies of the USSR, which has clearly indicated its resolve not to allow the Arabs to lose another war, and in fact seems willing to risk using nuclear weapons to assure this. The intelligence at the disposal of our government provides evidence that the Russians either had placed nuclear arms in Egypt or were in the process of doing so when the U.S. military alert made them retrace their steps. In any event, the Soviet nuclear threat—even if it were checked by an American or Israeli deterrent—is an effective counter to Israel's military superiority. Were it actually to be carried out, Israel would be annihilated.

The most powerful new factor in the Middle East situation, however, is the Arab use of oil for political ends. Directed at an industrial nation, this can be a deadly weapon. We might remind ourselves that dur-

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ing the 1935 Italo-EthNo Objection To Declassification in Full 2011/04/28 : LOC-HAK-189-7-2-3he  
 flict, Great Britain and France re-  
 frained from imposing an oil em-  
 bargo against Italy, despite the call  
 for sanctions by the League of Na-  
 tions, because they were afraid Mus-  
 solini would have to go to war over  
 it; and that the American oil em-  
 bargo against Japan in 1940 launch-  
 ed the United States on the road to  
 Pearl Harbor. The withholding of  
 oil from a modern nation means  
 economic strangulation, with incal-  
 culable social and political disloca-  
 tions.

Facing such disastrous prospects,  
 the victim of an embargo has only  
 two options: to fight with every  
 means at his disposal or to give in  
 to the demands of the oil-producer.  
 In the present instance, to give in  
 is by far the easier choice, especially  
 because those primarily affected are  
 not suffering in defense of their own  
 interests, but for the interests of a  
 small, dependent, widely unpopular  
 third nation. Paradoxically, though,  
 Japan and Western Europe, who  
 are most in need of Mideast oil,  
 have no direct way of satisfying the  
 Arab demands, whereas the United  
 States, the country least susceptible  
 to oil blackmail, is the only one able  
 to exert virtually irresistible pressure  
 on Jerusalem.

We are thus witnessing the de-  
 velopment of an intricate network  
 of forces, all working to Israel's dis-  
 advantage. For the reduced Arab oil  
 shipments threaten America's two  
 principal allies, Japan and the Fed-  
 eral Republic of Germany, with a  
 catastrophe they cannot combat  
 themselves. Hence the United States,  
 faced merely with the prospect of  
 considerable yet tolerable inconve-  
 nience, is obliged to pressure Israel  
 to accede to the main Arab de-  
 mands.

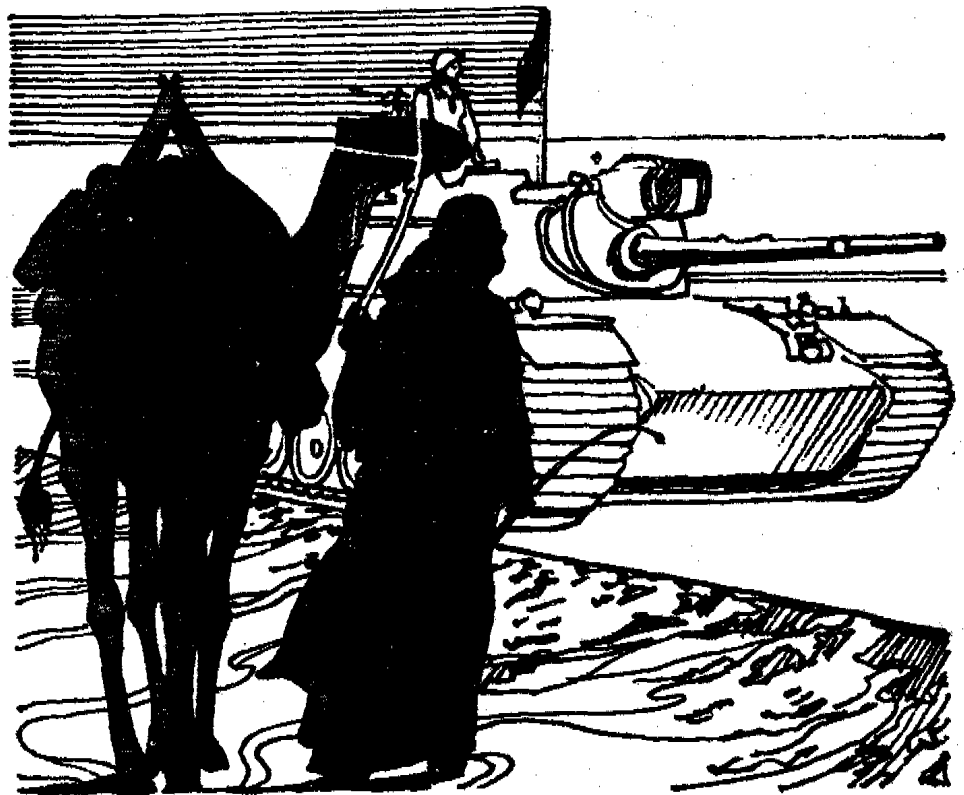
As the October War newly and  
 drastically revealed, there is a direct  
 relationship between the level of  
 pressure the U.S. is capable of exert-  
 ing and the extent of Israel's de-  
 pendence upon Washington for mili-  
 tary aid. The Jewish State is today

matically and politically, and can  
 turn nowhere except to its American  
 ally for assistance. The Administra-  
 tion, meanwhile, has decided to use  
 its monopoly position to enforce  
 what is being called an "even-hand-  
 ed" policy but is really an open  
 switch from "counseling modera-  
 tion" without applying strong pres-  
 sure to putting the American foot  
 down.

**T**HIS COURSE of action, albeit  
 triggered by the new Arab  
 oil diplomacy, has long had  
 its advocates among U.S. policy

NIXON Administration to preserve  
 the appearance of détente by avoid-  
 ing an open confrontation with the  
 Kremlin. Therefore, although the  
 United States and the Soviet Union  
 found themselves supporting oppo-  
 site sides in the war, their visions  
 of a peace settlement tend to coin-  
 cide.

The immediate goals of the new  
 U.S. policy are the retreat of Israel  
 to its 1967 borders (with minor  
 modifications), international super-  
 vision for the Arab holy places in  
 Jerusalem, and some sort of agree-  
 ment on the Palestinian refugees. In



makers. The enthusiastic pro-Israel  
 rhetoric that politicians have in-  
 dulged in for obvious domestic po-  
 litical reasons has always been re-  
 ceived with private misgivings by  
 officials who felt that our making  
 common cause with Israel was both  
 alienating the Arabs and opening  
 the door to preponderant Soviet in-  
 fluence in the Middle East. In the  
 light of the developments flowing  
 from the October War, that view  
 has come to dominate the inner  
 councils of the government. It is

return for its concessions, Israel  
 would be recognized by the Arab  
 governments as a legitimate sover-  
 eign state; more specifically, it would  
 be compensated for its withdrawal  
 to the 1967 lines by an international  
 guarantee of those borders—prob-  
 ably involving the UN.

A settlement of this kind assumes  
 that the sole issue at stake between  
 Israel and the Arabs, aside from the  
 status of the refugees, is the restora-  
 tion of the territorial status quo  
 prior to 1967. That assumption, in

turn, rests on another assumption: that the Arab leaders have changed their fundamental attitude toward the continued existence of the State of Israel.

Yet it is an undisputed historic fact that none of the violent encounters in the Middle East between the Arabs and the Jews—from the '20s to the Six Day War—had anything to do with the boundaries of the Jewish State. They concerned first the presence of Jewish settlers in Palestine, and then the existence of a Jewish state in the midst of the

ence of all Arab governments on "the restoration of the legitimate rights of the Palestinians."

**I**T IS HARDLY necessary to point out that had the October War started at the 1967 frontiers, Israel would have been in mortal danger, even if it had avoided its initial military mistakes. And given the unfavorable geopolitical configuration, if it is in mortal danger, it is likely to be doomed. Foreign intervention on its behalf, assuming it were available, would come too late

to protect them from a ground attack either: Is it likely that foreign governments would allow their soldiers to die for a nation with which most of them do not even maintain diplomatic relations?

But the crucial issue for Israel's future is the meaning of the demand for "the restoration of the legitimate rights of the Palestinians." Let us imagine for a moment that in the aftermath of World War II, the millions of Germans fleeing from the East were condemned by the Bonn government to the misery of refugee camps, with the stipulation that their "legitimate rights" had to be restored. Would the Soviet Union and Poland have been eccentric to assume that the West Germans were insisting on the right of the refugees to return to their original homes? The same logic, applied to the Arab stipulation, would mean the right of the Palestinians to return to what is now Israel. That is to say, it would mean the destruction of the Jewish State.

Political circumstances may suggest different interpretations, and political expediency may well make it advisable to play down this one. Still, both the artificial preservation of more than a million Palestinians in the status of refugees, to be used as political pawns, and the defenselessness of an Israel with 1967 borders, give this interpretation plausibility. In the end, Israel's fate may well hinge upon the credibility of Egyptian President Anwar el-Sadat's commitment to the Jewish State's peaceful existence.

When Neville Chamberlain went to Munich, he had no intention of destroying Czechoslovakia; he thought instead that he had assured peace in our time. On his deathbed, the former Prime Minister remarked that everything would have turned out all right if Hitler had not lied to him. Let us hope Henry Kissinger will not have occasion to assert that everything in the Middle East would have turned out all right if Sadat had not lied to him.



Arab world. What is more, the issue continues to be defined in these terms by the governments of Libya and Iraq, as well as by the Palestinian organizations.

Of course, the other Arab governments may have had a change of heart and reconciled themselves to Israel's survival. But in order to base policy upon this possibility, one still must disregard three things: the indefensibility of Israel within the 1967 borders, implicitly recognized by the tender of international guarantees; the proven worthlessness of such guarantees; and the insist-

—and its availability is moot. In 1957, the United Nations induced Israel to withdraw from Sinai in exchange for an Anglo-French-American guarantee of open passage through the Straits of Tiran; when Egypt closed the Straits in 1967, Israel had to wage war by itself to reopen them.

Similarly, a UN peace-keeping force stationed at the 1967 borders would not be able to protect Israel from the Russian missiles at the disposal of the Egyptians, with their range of up to 180 miles. Indeed, the Israelis could not expect such a